

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe

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THINGS FALL APART

by
Chinua Achebe

Teacher Guide

Written by
Mary L. Dennis

Note

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Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with your class.

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Research

“Yam, the king of crops, was a man’s crop” (page 23). Find out more about the type of yams grown in Africa. How are they like/unlike the sweet potatoes and yams grown in the United States? What are some good reasons for eating yams? What are some ways to prepare them?

Chapters 4-6, pp. 28-56

Summary: Ikemefuna begins to feel like part of Okonkwo’s family. Okonkwo is punished by the earth goddess for beating one of his wives during the Week of Peace. Okonkwo berates his gentle son, Nwoye, for the way he cuts yams for planting, and shouts his anger at Ekwefi, his second wife, whom he has just beaten for cutting some leaves from a banana tree. There is a funeral and a wrestling match.

Vocabulary

brusqueness 2	contradicted 26	indred 2	communal 28
placid 1	ordained 30	reverent 1	valediction 32
disquieting 3	dynamism 34	arcuous 34	calabashes 36
revealed 7	tentative 38	portage 43	granpees 46
about 17	disembodied 3		

Discussion Questions

1. What did the oracles mean at the kindred meeting, near which he said “those whose palm kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble”? (He meant that Okonkwo happened to have good luck and success, but that didn’t give him the right to act superior.) Do you think Okonkwo was “just lucky”? (He had worked hard to overcome his misfortune.) How did Okonkwo use “the power of positive thinking”? (He said “yes” and “no” when he said yes; i. e., he believed in himself.)
2. How did Ikemefuna adjust to his new home? (He was lonely and homesick at first, but Nwoye and Nwoye’s mother were kind to him and helped him.) How did Okonkwo treat Ikemefuna? (He treated him “with a heavy hand” but was inwardly fond of him.) Do you think Ikemefuna could tell that Okonkwo really liked him?
3. How did Okonkwo get into trouble with Ezeani? (Okonkwo beat one of his wives, Ojiugo, during the Week of Peace, when it was unheard of to beat anyone.) Do

you think he was punished mostly because he hurt his wife or mostly because he disrespected the gods and ancestors? (*The priest agrees the wife was at fault; apparently wife-beating would be quite acceptable during a different week.*)

4. How did Okonkwo's evil act affect his reputation in the village? (*People said he had gone too far, that his good fortune had gone to his head.*) Do you think they were secretly glad he had done something wrong?
5. Why does Okonkwo threaten to break Nwoye's jaw, strangle him, break his head? (*He is not satisfied with the way Nwoye prepares the seed yams.*) Do you think being such a mean, pushy parent will make Nwoye turn out as Okonkwo hopes?
6. To which Jewish holiday could you compare the feast of the New Yam? (*The Igbo call it *iwaaanza*, New Year's Day.*) Why do you suppose food is so often a part of religious and holiday celebrations of all kinds, everywhere? Do you find any irony in Okonkwo's prayers to his ancestors (page 39) to protect him, his children, and their mothers? (*He has just eaten and shot at one wife. He treats everyone harshly.*)
8. On pages 40-41, what evidence do you see that some people's lives are controlled by superstition? (*Ezinma's twitching eyelid "means she will see something."* Ezeife doesn't answer "yes" or "no" and she will be an evil spirit at the door.)
9. What are the tasks of the women and girls in the village? (*They do the cooking, weed the gardens, plant crops like melons and beans.*) Do you think they are happy with their lives? Do you suppose all fathers in the village treat their little girls as Okonkwo does? Ezinma and Obiageli—are some more affectionate?
10. Why does Ekwere tell Chielo, "I cannot find a route with which to tell the story" (page 45)? (*She still can't believe Okonkwo shot at her.*) Why does Chielo say she thinks Ezinma will "stay"? Where would she go? (*She means that Ezinma has passed through the ages of men and childhood illness might have killed her—she is now likely to "stay" in the land of the living.*) How do you know Ekwere means everything to her mother? (*Ekwere sighs, "I pray she stays,"* page 46.) Is the priestess of Agbala as you expected?
11. What were the most exciting moments in the wrestling matches? (*when a man was thrown*) How do you think these matches were like/unlike those televised today, for example the World Wrestling Federation matches?

Prediction: Why will the villagers of Umuofia be delighted with an invasion of locusts?

Supplementary Activities

Literary Analysis: Point of View

Point of view refers to the vantage point from which the narrator views the action of the story and relates it to the reader. In a **first-person** narrative, the story is told from the viewpoint of one person, usually the main character. A **third-person omniscient** narrator can “see over” everything that is happening and into each character’s heart and mind. A **third-person limited** point of view means there are some restrictions on what can be seen; the narrator may know only what is happening to a few characters in one setting.

Ask: From what point of view does Achebe tell the story in *Things Fall Apart*? (third person omniscient) How do you know? (We are told about the inner feelings of many of the characters. Achebe “sees” what is happening all over the village.)

Writing Activities

1. Reread the description of the conversation between Ekwefi and Chielo on pages 48-49. Rewrite the scene from the first-person point of view (“I...”). Choose either Ekwefi or Chielo as your narrator.
2. Write a character sketch of someone you know who likes to act superior to others and puts down those who are less successful. (Be sure to give the person a fictitious name.) You might first organize your thoughts by jottin character traits and examples in a graphic like the one below.
3. Write the letter Ikemefuna might send to his mother during his first days at Umuofia.

example:		example:	
	trait:		trait:
	trait:		trait:
example:		example:	